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English bishops welcomed a Court of Appeal ruling that a pregnant mentally disabled woman did not need to have an abortion.

On June 24, the court overturned an earlier Court of Protection ruling that the Nigerian Catholic woman in her 20s, who cannot be named for legal reasons, must undergo the abortion because it was in her "best interests." The woman has the mental age of between 6 and 9 years and is about 22 weeks pregnant.

"It is both astonishing and shocking" that England's National Health Service "should seek to end a healthy pregnancy against the wishes of the pregnant woman, her mother, and her social worker," said Auxiliary Bishop John Sherrington of Westminster, who takes the lead on life issues for the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

"Forcing a woman to have an abortion against her will, and that of her close family, would have infringed her human rights and the right of her unborn child to life in a family that has committed to caring for this child. In a free society like ours, there is a delicate balance between the rights of the individual and the powers of the state, and the initial ruling upset that balance. I am therefore pleased that the recent ruling has taken the woman's best interests into account and has upheld her rights in this case," he said.

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"This case raises fundamental questions of human rights, and there is now an urgent need for the government to clarify what the limits are on the powers of the NHS to force abortions on women who do not want them," he said.

Bishop Mark Davies of Shrewsbury told Catholic News Service, "It would have been a dark day for the British legal system if the courts forced a mother against her will to have an abortion."

"The disregard of the fundamental right to life of the unborn child would be compounded by the disregard of the rights of the mother and her family," he said. "It is impossible to comprehend how a court could also fail to take into account the damage inflicted by abortion on a woman's health and well-being."